

Tobacco 21

Smoking among adolescents and young adults

In Indiana, about 5,700 youth become daily smokers each year,¹ and an estimated 150,700 Indiana youth currently under age 18 will eventually die from smoking.² Smoking is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States and Indiana, costing the lives of 11,100 Hoosiers annually.² “Tobacco 21” laws, which raise the minimum age of legal access (MLA) to purchase tobacco to 21 years, could help reduce tobacco use and prevent tobacco-related diseases.

Why raise the minimum age to purchase tobacco to 21?

Most regular smokers start by age 21.

- 95% of adult smokers start smoking before age 21.³
- Many smokers transition from experimental to regular tobacco use between ages 18 and 21. Less than half (46%) of adult smokers become daily smokers before age 18, but approximately 80% become daily smokers before age 21.⁴

Reduce youth access to tobacco.

- In Indiana, 72% of high school smokers under age 18 reported getting cigarettes from social sources, such as borrowing or having someone else buy the cigarettes they smoked.⁵
- 90% of people who buy cigarettes to give to minors are under age 21.⁶
- Smokers ages 18 to 19 are the most likely age group to be asked to provide tobacco to minors.⁷

Reduce youth smoking rates.

- In the five years following a law in Needham, MA that raised the age for tobacco sales to 21, youth smoking in Needham dropped by nearly half, from 13% to 7%.⁸

It could result in substantial health benefits.

- In March 2015, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) concluded that raising the tobacco sale age to 21 could substantially reduce youth tobacco use initiation, smoking prevalence, and negative health consequences of smoking.⁹

Nicotine has a stronger impact on youth and young adults.¹⁰

- Brain development continues through young adulthood, making young people highly susceptible to nicotine.
- Adolescents become addicted to nicotine more quickly and at lower levels of use than adults.

Tobacco companies target youth.

- Tobacco companies market heavily to youth and young adults to recruit “replacement smokers” to sustain their profits.¹¹

State and local “Tobacco 21” laws¹⁰

Although the federal minimum age for tobacco sales is 18, states and local jurisdictions have the authority to enact laws requiring a higher minimum age.

- In June 2015, Hawaii became the first state in the U.S. to raise the minimum age of tobacco sales to 21.
- Over 100 municipalities in the U.S., including New York City, have raised the minimum age for tobacco sales to 21.

Quick Stats:

95% of adult smokers start smoking before age 21.³

Raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco to 21 nationwide could result in:¹²

- **12% decrease** in smoking prevalence
- **4,000 fewer** infant deaths from sudden infant death syndrome
- **286,000 fewer** premature births
- **438,000 fewer** low birth weight births
- **50,000 fewer** deaths from lung cancer
- **223,000 fewer** premature deaths
- **4.2 million fewer** years of life lost

3 out of 4 adults support raising the minimum age of sale for tobacco to 21.¹³



References

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